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Long May You Run

Sonya Jongsma Knauss
Dordt College, sonya.knauss@dordt.edu

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Long May You Run

Abstract

"There's something purifying about sweat, and exertion, and fresh air, and the long happy sigh you get to breathe when it's done."

Posting about the joy of running from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/long-may-you-run/>

Keywords

In All Things, joy, running, life

Disciplines

Health Psychology

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Long May You Run

 [all in allthings.org/long-may-you-run/](https://allinallthings.org/long-may-you-run/)

Sonya Jongsma Knauss

When I was 13, I learned what made my heart sing. It started with a simple calculation, one that, in sports-crazed small-town Northwest Iowa, seemed to make sense.

Nobody else really likes running the longer distances in track, I figured. Maybe that's something I can claim for my own. Being a mediocre volleyball player or sitting the bench in basketball didn't do much for my self-esteem. In elementary school, I spent most of my spare time reading and practicing piano and violin, but I'm antsy. Reading was an escape; music was a sometimes-pleasant chore. I needed something active.

So I got some Reeboks and tried to make a discipline of it, going out and running around the circular drive near the New Homestead housing development. Three times made a mile, and that was about it. It was a slog, but I liked how I felt afterward. There's something purifying about sweat, and exertion, and fresh air, and the long happy sigh you get to breathe when it's done.

That spring, I ran a few decent times and won a few ribbons of varying colors. But I had no idea what was ahead when [Coach Mark Kauk](#) recruited me to his cross country program at Unity. I was supposed to log some miles over the summer, but I'm a procrastinator. I barely managed to accumulate 25 miles, the minimum requirement for newbies, by the time the season started. I might have hit two miles in a row once. I got contacts that summer, to keep the sweaty glasses from slipping off my face. I graduated to ASICS, which I've been wearing ever since.

I have an idealized image of those four years of running now, and for good reason. It was life-changing. A wise, encouraging, soft-spoken coach who inspired his runners by being the kind of person you didn't want to disappoint and teammates who were like the sisters I didn't have were a big part of the equation. For someone who often felt like I didn't quite fit in, running made me feel alive and hopeful and gave me a place to belong. And it was a great outlet for my competitive spirit.

The heart song of the run helped me get through high school, with friend stresses, academic pressures, anorexia struggles, and my first break-up. I discovered [runner's high](#) on a hot summer day, logging a 5-miler on the blacktop after a long day of detasseling. I squinted into the hot sun, saw the world lit up with beauty, and through tingling goosebumps decided that at that moment I might just be able to run forever.

After doing some research, I discovered recent scientific studies that show running has a [measurable effect on moods](#), including [reducing anxiety and depression](#) in many who do it regularly. I could've told you that. It literally creates joy; I can feel it almost every single time I lace my shoes and go out for a run. It's gratitude, peace, joy, deep contentment, and more.

I like running alone, just me and the road and my music. I like running with friends, who, as the miles and hours go by, become confidants and encouragers and understand that "what's said on the road stays on the road." I like watching my daughter run, even though once upon a time she swore she would never do so because it was "my thing." I'm grateful that she is training under the same coach who taught me the love of running, the discipline of hard work, and the wisdom of listening to your body and taking rest days.

I've learned that I don't have to win to feel joyful about a race, and that there are small victories to be found in every run. In fact, the thrill that came with every high finish on Drake's blue oval 25 years ago might even have been eclipsed by the joy I felt last year after my worst half marathon ever, sitting giddy in a cool

fountain in downtown Des Moines after tackling a hot humid [Dam to Dam](#) race with my brother.

Just a few years shy of starting my fourth decade of running, I appreciate every mile. Sometimes I get to enjoy the elusive runner's high, but more often it's the simple buoyancy of spirit and happy anticipation I get when I set my alarm for an early morning run, or when I come in the door after criss-crossing sleepy streets and watching the sun explode into view over houses and fields. Sipping coffee, peeking in at my sleeping children, I'm almost surprised the song in my heart hasn't woken them up.